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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000102

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: HALABJAH DETAINEES SPEAK ABOUT KRG ABUSES

REF: A) KIRKUK 80, B) KIRKUK 79, C) KIRKUK 78

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CLASSIFIED BY: JBIGUS, PRT LEADER, REO Kirkuk, DoS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A young teacher and student each describe their detention following the Halabjah protests on March 16. Neither of them participated in the demonstrations. The PUK thwarted more student demonstrations in Kalar through beefed-up security and intimidation. PRT finds these disturbing reports credible, and believes that the Asayish may have responded even more harshly to those who actually participated in the demonstrations. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On 19 April Twanna Khasraw Abdullah, a student union leader from Halabjah, and Nihat Abd al-Rahman Faraj, former Halabjah detainee, discussed with IPAQ their detention stories in connection with the March 16 Halabjah demonstrations (REFTELS).

Arrested and Detained in Hormel Jail

¶3. (C) Faraj - a political independent and 29-year-old teacher - traveled from his home in Hormel (about 15 kilometers outside Halabjah) to Halabjah on the afternoon of March 16 to verify the well-being of his younger brother, who participated in the demonstrations. Faraj stayed that night at his parents' home in Halabjah and was detained by the Asayish (PUK internal security forces) the following morning at a checkpoint.

¶4. (C) Faraj reported that Asayish officers took him to the Hormel jail that day, where they interrogated him. They pressured him to divulge information, demanding several times that he confess why they had arrested him. They tried coercing Faraj by telling him that they had photographic evidence of his involvement in the demonstrations and that they only had detained those persons caught on film. Faraj said Asayish officers specifically accused him of breaking one of the Halabjah monument's air conditioning units (REFTEL C). He said he did not sleep an hour that night because the prisoners were shouting at the security guards and cursing the government.

Halabjah Prison

¶5. (C) The following morning, Asayish officers transferred Faraj to Halabjah prison. He said most of those detained in connection with the protests were between the ages of 15 and 20. The security guards intimidated the detainees through verbal

abuse, which Faraj described as effective because most detainees were young and scared. Faraj witnessed prison guards beating several detainees, breaking some of their teeth. He said he watched security guards place a sack over the head of a 17-year-old, beat him with a cable for a long time, and then tell him they were going to throw him in a river. When the security guards dragged the man outside, he begged the guards to shoot him instead of throwing him in the river. The guards eventually returned him to his cell.

Released on Father's Reputation

¶6. (C) Faraj said he owed avoidance of physical beatings and several more days of confinement to his father's reputation. Faraj's father, Mullah Abdul, is famous in Halabjah. Mullah Abdul, the principal of a primary school in Halabjah, was arrested three times by the Ba'athist regime for his involvement in the Kurdish revolution. While Faraj was in Halabjah prison, his father called the chief of Asayish in Halabjah - Akram (LNU) - requesting that the Asayish release Faraj because he did not participate in the protests. Akram told Mullah Abdul that he would release Faraj even if he were involved "because he is your son." The Asayish freed Faraj shortly thereafter.

Another Detention Story

¶7. (C) Abdullah told IPAO the experiences of a close associate, Hemen Hama Husayn, who the Asayish detained for 12 days in connection with the Halabjah protests. Abdullah explained that Husayn's parents prohibited him from going to Kirkuk REO with Abdullah, due to possible further backlash from the Asayish. Husayn was in As Sulaymaniyah on March 16 and did not participate in the Halabjah protests. Husayn told Abdullah that he believed he was detained because he was affiliated with the Kurdistan Islamic Group.

¶8. (C) Three Asayish officers arrested Husayn a day after the

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protests at the Sirwan market (about five kilometers outside Halabjah). Asayish officers approached him and interrogated him, accusing him of protesting. The authorities then placed a bag over his head, threw him in a pickup truck, and took him to Halabjah prison. For the next 12 days, Husayn remained in prison, where security guards blindfolded him and beat him daily. Husayn said he became unconscious twice, due to the combination of severe beatings and a chronic chest condition.

Detainees Withhold Truth From NGOs

¶9. (C) According to Husayn, human rights NGO's arrived at Halabjah prison on April 20 - four days after the protests - but the detainees feared telling NGO's the truth. Husayn said the detainees were unsure if the NGO's in reality worked for the PUK. The Asayish allowed Husayn's relatives to visit him after a week. Husayn said the Asayish transferred those students who were guilty of destroying the Halabjah monument to As Sulaymaniyah prison. He plans to sue the KRG for unlawful detention and human rights abuses.

Kosrat Rasul Frees the Detainees

¶10. (C) Abdullah said PUK Politburo Secretary Kosrat Rasul on 18 April held a conference with the city's Halabjah residents in Halabjah and announced that the detainees who protested in Halabjah would be released. Abdullah also reported that Halabjah residents recently were gathering signatures, requesting that the Kurdistan National Assembly make Halabjah a separate province from As Sulaymaniyah.

PUK Thwarts Kalar Protests

¶11. (C) When asked why no anti-government demonstrations occurred in Kalar on April 14 during the commemoration of the Anfal attacks, Abdullah said the PUK sent large numbers of security personnel to prevent any potential demonstrators. He said Kalar residents were intimidated by the stories of the harsh Asayish response to Halabjah protestors. Abdullah added that a PUK-sponsored student retreat lured students from Kalar outside the city for the day.

Comment

¶12. (C) These first and second-hand accounts of alleged unlawful detention and human rights abuses are disturbing. We imagine that the Asayish probably responded more harshly to those who actually protested. Faraj's youthful appearance and the fact he was trying to leave Halabjah the morning after the protests placed him at the wrong place at the wrong time. Husayn's belief that the Asayish arrested him because of his affiliation with the Kurdistan Islamic Group is plausible because PUK authorities initially blamed young Islamic activists for the demonstrations.

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